Granada Corporation

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A specialized approach to serving Hispanic customers. Company extends localized marketing strategies to the service experience.

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Businesses have recognized the spending power of the U.S. Hispanic market and, in the last decade, have increasingly targeted this fast-growing consumer segment. Research firm eMarketer reports that Hispanic ad spending was up just over 11% last year, with U.S. marketers spending nearly $8 billion on major media targeted toward Hispanic consumers.

"Latinos are emerging as a powerhouse of economic influence, presenting marketers an increasingly influential consumer group that can translate into business impact," says Monica Gil, senior VP of Public Affairs and Government Relations for Nielsen ("5 Steps To Capturing The Hispanic Market—The Last True Growth Opportunity," *Forbes*, September 3, 2013). "The key is to recognize that today's modern Latino is 'ambicultural' with the ability to seamlessly pivot between English and Spanish languages and to embrace two distinct cultures. Understanding how to connect with this unique consumer profile will be key to successful engagement."

Underappreciated, perhaps, is how quality of service drives customer experience and company's brand equity in this market. According to Google's head of multicultural marketing, Eliana Murillo, "Hispanics are four times more likely than general market to share branded content through social media."

Localized marketing strategies, a proven approach to establishing a solid connection, have been on the upswing in recent years. But in many cases, the efforts end once the customer has been acquired. Often overlooked is the post-purchase experience, which lacks the specialized communication and cultural insights that will lead to a satisfactory experience and, ultimately, customer retention.

That is the gap that Granada Corporation wants to fill.

Granada, a provider of customer experience and support services for companies serving the Hispanic market, strives to help companies improve the experience and revenue potential of their Hispanic customers. Unlike the typical approach to serving Hispanic customers—employing bilingual agents in the center or outsourcing Spanish-language calls to offshore centers—Granada's approach focuses on communicating with Hispanic customers in an acculturated way that enhances the experience and improves loyalty, says Founder and CEO Kit Cooper.

"Clients' competitors already are marketing in a localized way. The next step in competitive advantage is setting up in-culture operations with unique acquisition, support and retention processes," he says. Cooper is no stranger to the field. In 1999, he cofounded Hispanic Teleservices Corporation (HTC), the first customer service outsourcer to focus on the U.S. Hispanic market through nearshore operations based in Latin America.

With Granada, Cooper has developed a domestic talent base of work-at-home agents, which provides clients with greater bilingual scalability. Hispanic customers in a particular location are served by agents who are not only fluent in both English and Spanish, but who understand the distinctive culture of that area's Hispanic community. "The ability to use a 'locals serving locals' approach appeals to companies that are interested in building equity in the communities they serve," he says. In addition, being able to relate to the customer in ways beyond speaking the same language helps to establish an emotional bond with the company, enhancing customer loyalty and revenue.

Vibrant People-Focused Culture

Granada's "secret sauce" is a culture that is people-focused and has strong ties to the local Hispanic communities where its clients do business. As Cooper points out, "If you have a workstation that is bilingual-capable, whether it's in Phoenix or Central America, if that agent hasn't been in a Hispanic-centric environment from recruiting to onboarding to training to day-to-day operations, the connection with the customer will not be as meaningful."

Granada's culture is shaped by two key principles that form the foundation of its people strategy:

It's not about you! This is one of Granada's most important principles and is the perfect philosophy for frontline staff to have, says Cooper. "We look for people with a humble attitude and overall 'no drama' approach to work and life," he explains. "Individuals with low self-orientation, who don't take things personally and who have a truly results-oriented mindset tend to have the view that, 'My job is

Kit Cooper (center) with the Granada Corporation management team

to make our clients' lives easier. It's not about me; it's not about my issues.' That's the right approach and philosophy for service and sales."

Don't take yourself too seriously. "This is another principle that is core to who we are," Cooper says. "We admire people who don't take themselves too seriously. We don't, and we don't want to be around people that do."

Cooper is a firm believer in sharing strategies and advice that can help to improve employees' quality of life. His passion led him to launch a 501c3 Foundation a few years ago called the Quality of Life Project (www.qualityoflifeproject.org). The project conducts in-depth interviews with individuals like Richard Branson (Virgin Group), Tim Koogle (Yahoo!) and Sol "Solly" Amon (Pure Food Fish Market)—those who are successful, not just in business, but in life. It then shares their insights on its website and through social media and community events.

"We're curious people," Cooper says. "We will gather the big-life perspectives that have been important to the quality of life for these individuals, as well as the more granular ideas, and publish content that will inspire others."

Stringent Recruiting and Hiring Approach Targets Top Talent

To ensure that they are continually building a strong, people-centric culture, Granada leadership is discerning about whom they bring onboard. A rigorous screening process is designed to identify those individuals who are the best fit for a client's customer base and service vision, as well as Granada's own values and guiding principles.

The work-from-home model provides Granada with a wide talent pool, and the ability to be highly selective in hiring. "It allows us to strictly adhere to our recruitment filters. Once we establish a profile for the position, we do not compromise our filters," Cooper stresses. "If necessary, we will invest in additional recruitment marketing rather than sacrifice the quality of our recruitment pool and the talent that we hire."

Granada's close ties to Hispanic community leaders helps to boost its recruiting efforts through referrals and word-of-mouth. Its advisory board includes well-known leaders from top media, entertainment, technology, finance and talent management organizations across the country who are always willing and able to spread the word about open positions.

The hiring process itself Cooper describes as "brutally stringent," involving multiple assessment tiers during which candidates interact with managers and supervisors, role-play and perform certain tasks, as well as testing on English and Spanish competencies, soft skills and technical skills.

One of the final hiring filters is subject-matter expert approval. All screening interviews with candidates are recorded and made available to the subject-matter expert who has the authority to accept or reject candidates. The SME may be a trainer, operations manager or supervisor—"it's an individual who really knows the profile for a particular position," he says.

Besides the specific attributes that clients are looking for, Granada's management team also has a basic hiring profile for all candidates, says Cooper, adding that: "We look for people who are committed to the work and who respect the feedback process. They're going to show up, and they're going to try to be the best that they can."

It seems to be working. Granada's extremely low attrition rate (less than 3%), low tardiness and low absenteeism attests to its success.

Supervisors Focus on Building Strong Relationships

Another reason for the low attrition is the strong relationships that Granada's supervisors build with their teams.

Supervisors set individual performance goals each week for each agent. An internally developed toolset helps supervisors and agents stay on top of their targets and performance. Agents can view past and current performance, their weekly goal, and easily see what they need to do to hit that goal.

But the tools do not replace the one-on-one coaching and feedback that supervisors provide to their teams.

In fact, agent development is a key element of the supervisor's role at Granada. "Our supervisors are very cognizant of that, especially since their bonus is determined by the quality of their leadership," Cooper says. "Our Quality of Relationship (QOR) process allows agents to score the quality of their supervisor's leadership; which, in turn, drive the supervisors' variable compensation. The quality of the supervisors' relationships with their teams and the respect that the frontline staff have for their leaders—that's a key strength of our business."

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